MI Access
Michigan's Alternate Assessment Program

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1 Welcome Back!

2 Notes from the Contractor

3 The BRIGANCE® Is Selected As Interim Phase 2 Assessment

4 MI-Access Intersects with P. A. 25 and NCLB

4 Status Report on Assessments for LEP Students

5 Balancing Legal Requirements: Assessment, Accountability, and Accommodations

8 The National Assessment of Educational Progress and NCLB

9 Phase 2 MI-Access Update

9 Glossary

10 Tools to Help IEP Teams Determine State Assessment

10 IEP Team Decision-Making Checklist

10 Reminder: MI-Access Switches from Age to Grade…

11 IEP Team Decision-Making Flow Chart

Back Cover
Important MI-Access Dates
Bookmark these Web sites

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The Assist

Helping to Improve Access to and Progress in the General Curriculum

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WELCOME BACK!

Dear Readers,

Welcome back to school. I hope you had an enjoyable summer. There are many new and exciting things going on with MI-Access that I want to share with you.

This summer we posted the *Proposed Assessment Plan for Developing Phase 2.1 MI-Access Assessments* on the MDE Web site at **www.mi.gov/mi-access**. Now that you have had time to review it, we need your feedback. The official comment period runs from August 15 through October 17, so if you would like to share your thoughts with us, please do so through our online survey at **http://esrealitycheck.com/survey/index.asp?i=1295513**. (See the article titled "Phase 2 MI-Access Update" for more information.)

The proposed assessment plan is just one example of the ways in which we are listening to you. Last year we had online surveys to gather feedback on (1) the Annual MI-Access Live Teleconference, (2) the 2002/2003 MI-Access CD-ROM, (3) the *Draft Guidelines for Determining Participation in State Assessment for Students with Disabilities*, and (4) the MI-Access assessment training materials and administration process. We received hundreds of responses, analyzed them, and are incorporating the feedback into everything we do.

We also continue to involve you—our stakeholders—in the assessment refinement and development process. For example, some of your colleagues worked with BETA/TASA, the MI-Access contractor, and the MDE this summer to write and edit items for the Phase 2.1 MI-Access assessments. Others met last spring and advised the MDE to purchase the BRIGANCE® to use as the state's standardized assessment until our own Phase 2 MI-Access assessments are implemented statewide. (See the article titled "The BRIGANCE® Is Selected as Interim Phase 2 Assessment.") Still others of your colleagues continue to provide guidance and advice through numerous MI-Access standing committees, without which we could not be making such considerable progress.

To all of you who have helped on committees, and to those who have provided us with valuable feedback, thank you. I am looking forward to another great year of working together!

Sincerely,

Peggy Dutcher
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If you have ideas, suggestions, or tips you would like to see included in *The Assist,* send them to **mi-access@tasa.com**.

NOTES FROM THE CONTRACTOR TO MI-ACCESS COORDINATORS

Update MI-Access coordinator designations and request training materials online now.

MI-Access training materials for the 2003/2004 school year will be shipped to districts in early September. To make sure they get to the right people at the right place, we need the following information from you immediately:

1) **Who are your MI-Access Coordinators?** We need updated names, addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses for all District and School MI-Access Coordinators.

2) **How many 2003/2004 MI-Access training packets do you need?** Remember, training packets are updated every year, so you need to order them for everyone who will be involved in organizing and administering MI-Access assessments this year – even those who have received training packets before.

If you have already sent us this information, thank you. If not, you can submit it online before August 21, 2003, at **www.mi-access.org/2004info**. For answers to questions about online submission, call the toll-free MI-Access Hotline at 1-888-382-4246.

Look for reports on your Students Eligible for Phase 2 MI-Access.

Thanks to all of you who submitted your Phase 2 data online by the June 6 deadline, we were able to complete processing of the Phase 2 assessment results. Reports of the results will be mailed to districts by the end of the month.

We have received some very positive feedback about the online data collection system. If you have thoughts or ideas you would like to share with us about it—what you liked or how we might improve it—please e-mail them to **mi-access@tasa.com**.

Preprinted Student Scan Sheets for Winter 2004

By the 2004/2005 school year, all MI-Access scan documents will be preprinted with student-, school-, and district-identifying information. Before using this process statewide, we are going to pilot it to allow us to iron out any bugs. To do that, we will select several districts to participate in a pilot for Winter 2004 MI-Access. If your district is not selected, but you would like to participate in the pilot, you may volunteer to do so. Simply e-mail us at **mi-access@tasa.com** and indicate your interest. Look for more details in the December issue of *The Assist.*

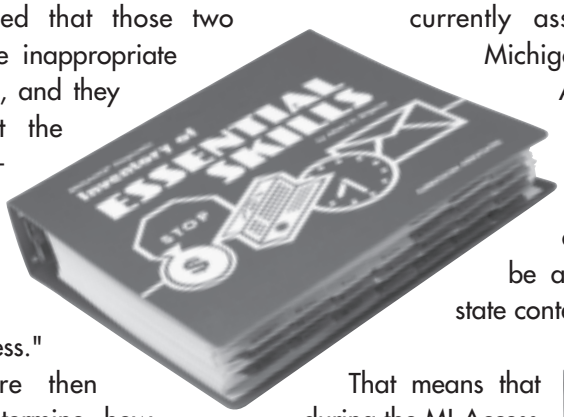
Student count estimates are due in October.

You will receive a mailing by October 1 requesting your best estimate of the number of students and assessment administrators who will be participating in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 MI-Access in winter 2004. We need these estimates in order to print sufficient quantities of assessment materials. Please look for your mailing soon and respond promptly.

Thanks again for your cooperation.

THE BRIGANCE® IS SELECTED AS INTERIM PHASE 2 ASSESSMENT

When MI-Access was implemented statewide in winter 2002, there were two assessments available: (1) MI-Access Participation and (2) MI-Access Supported Independence. If Individualized Education Program (IEP) Teams determined that those two assessments were inappropriate for their students, and they determined that the MEAP was inappropriate, the students were described as "eligible for Phase 2 MI-Access." IEP Teams were then instructed to determine how else their students would be assessed until Phase 2 MI-Access assessments were developed.



That broad option—of choosing any interim assessment—is no longer available. On the advice of a specially-convened panel of education experts, primarily school psychologists, the MDE has purchased the BRIGANCE to assess Phase 2 students until Phase 2 MI-Access assessments are implemented statewide. Districts will be receiving copies of the BRIGANCE materials in early September.

The panel members overwhelmingly agreed that the BRIGANCE was the best available off-the-shelf assessment option because it meets NCLB requirements, primarily that any assessment used must (1) be a standardized achievement test; (2) be criterion-referenced, (3) address both mathematics and English language arts (ELA); (4) cover grades 4, 7, 8, and 11 (the grades in which ELA and/or mathematics are currently assessed by the Michigan Educational Assessment Program); (5) be of high technical quality; and (6) be aligned with the state content standards.

That means that during the MI-Access assessment window this winter, all students eligible for Phase 2 MI-Access must be administered the BRIGANCE. A selection of assessment items from the green BRIGANCE (Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills-Revised [CIBS-R]) will be used for elementary and middle school students and another selection of assessment items from the Red BRIGANCE (the Inventory of Essential Skills [IES]) will be used for high school students.

Training on how to administer the BRIGANCE—and how it has been customized to fit Michigan's needs—will be provided at this year's MI-Access Annual Conferences for District and School MI-Access Coordinators. (See the box titled "Time Is Running Out! Register Now!" for conference dates and locations.) Two 100-minute sessions will be offered—one in the morning and one in the afternoon—so that coordinators will be able to attend the BRIGANCE training as well as other sessions.

The BRIGANCE training sessions will introduce coordinators to the Comprehensive Inventory of Basic Skills-Revised (CIBS-R) and the Inventory of Essential Skills (IES). Participants will look at the assessments as they have been customized for Michigan, discuss their use, and practice the assessment administration process and recording procedure. The workshop will serve as a refresher for those already using the BRIGANCE, as well as an introduction to those new to the assessment program. It also will explain how using the BRIGANCE as a state assessment differs from using it as a local assessment tool. The MDE also is looking at online training opportunities related to the BRIGANCE, so look for updates in future issues of *The Assist.*

BRIGANCE® is a Registered Trademark of Curriculum Associates, Inc.

TIME IS RUNNING OUT! REGISTER NOW!

Join your peers (District and School MI-Access Coordinators) in talking and learning about MI-Access at one of three MI-Access Annual Conferences scheduled this fall. Pick the one nearest you, and register now.

September 10 – Marquette @ Northern Michigan University
September 23 – Grayling @ the Holiday Inn
September 29 – Lansing @ the Sheraton Hotel

You may register online at www.gomiem.org.

MI-Access Intersects with P.A. 25 and NCLB

In June 2003, a memorandum was sent to all local and intermediate school district superintendents and public school academy authorizers and directors discussing additional reporting requirements for annual reports as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

The memo, authored by Jeremy Hughes, Chief Academic Officer/Deputy Superintendent, Michigan Department of Education (MDE), provided a checklist for school districts to use when developing their annual reports to ensure that they covered all the necessary information. It also suggested that the information required by Public Act 25 and that required by NCLB be merged into one common document and shared with parents and other education stakeholders through a common mechanism.

The checklist outlined the assessment data schools and districts must provide in their common report, including (1) aggregate student achievement data on state assessments at each proficiency level; (2) student achievement data at each proficiency level reported by disaggregated categories (race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged status); (3) the percent of students not tested; (4) two-year achievement trend data by subject area and grade level; and (5) individual school results of locally administered student competency and/or nationally-normed achievement tests.

Furthermore, it listed the information required to show Adequate Yearly Progress, including student proficiency on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) and MI-Access. For the MEAP, "proficient" is defined as student scores that meet or exceed Michigan standards. For MI-Access, "proficient" is defined as student scores that attain or surpass the performance standard.

For a copy of the memorandum and checklist, go to **http://www.mi.gov/documents/Memo_67231_7.pdf**.

Status Report on Assessments for Limited English Proficient (LEP) Students

During the 2002/2003 school year, students with limited English proficiency (LEP) had new opportunities to demonstrate what they know and can do. In response to the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act, the Office of Assessment and the Michigan Department of Education collaborated to (1) experiment with some new assessments, and (2) expand the list of standard assessment accommodations.

During the MEAP testing window for elementary and middle school students, school districts were offered alternative mathematics and reading assessments for the students they designated as LEP. Approximately 2,400 students took part in the alternatives. When 2002/2003 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) reports are released this month, the results for those assessments will be included.

In March 2003, the Merit Award Board—the policy-setting body for the Office of Assessment in the Michigan Department of Treasury—also approved the expansion of the list of standard assessment accommodations. All of the new accommodations were included specifically for use with LEP students. These accommodations were used for the first time during the High School Test cycle in spring 2003. The list of standard assessment accommodations and guidance on when and how to use them can be found on both the MDE (**http://www.mi.gov/mde/swd/accommodations**) and the MEAP Web sites (**http://www.meritaward.state.mi.us/mma/meap.htm**).

In addition to changes in academic assessments for LEP students, this was the first year for the mandated annual English language proficiency test. School districts reported their baseline data in June 2003, and a report of the compiled data is due to the U. S. Department of Education in September. The data were difficult to collect and interpret because Michigan does not have one common English language proficiency test in use across the state. Now, however, Michigan is collaborating with seventeen other states to produce a test that can and will be used statewide. The test is tentatively scheduled for availability in spring 2004. Details will be released to the field once they are known and finalized.

Balancing Legal Requirements: Assessment, Accountability, and Accommodations

By Miriam Kurtzig Freedman, M.A., J.D.

The following article includes excerpts from a presentation given by Miriam Kurtzig Freedman at the Michigan Council for Exceptional Children's 2003 Annual Conference. Ms. Freedman is a nationally-known speaker on the complex legal issues surrounding assessment and accountability. She brings to the subject a unique, but fitting, background—that of a former school teacher and a current attorney of counsel to the law firm of Stoneman, Chandler & Miller LLP (Boston, Massachusetts).

The excerpts chosen for inclusion in this issue of The Assist *focus particularly on the selection and use of appropriate and reasonable assessment accommodations. In talking with Ms. Freedman about this article, she said, "My number one interest is in supporting public education. I fervently believe that we need to maintain high standards for everyone. That means figuring out how to include English language learners, students with disabilities, and others, in all aspects of education without lowering standards." She goes on to explain that over the years she has learned that starting with the "what" instead of the "who" is imperative. If schools clearly specify "what" is important for all kids to learn and "what" the purpose of the curriculum is, then questions about who the student is and what accommodations he or she may need will be much easier to address.*

Ms. Freedman acknowledges that there are many important issues surrounding inclusion, high standards, and accountability; the primary focus of her presentation, however, and thus of this article, is on legal issues.

Question: From a legal perspective, what does assessing "all" students mean?

Answer: No exclusions. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) require all students to be assessed for accountability purposes. A September 1997 Joint Policy by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) and the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) specifies that excluding students from state- and districtwide assessments because of their disabilities violates Section 504, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the IDEA. If accommodations are required for students with disabilities to participate, they must be provided. If a student is to be excluded from participation in the general assessment, then that decision must be made by the student's Individualized Educational Program (IEP) Team, and the IEP must include a statement explaining why the student will not participate in the [general] assessment, and how else the student will be assessed.

Question: One option IEP Teams can select is an alternate assessment. How do you define alternate assessments?

Answer: Alternate assessments are intended for a small number of students who cannot participate in state- or districtwide tests, even with accommodations or modifications. In part, this is because they may not be participating in the general curriculum or may have an individualized curriculum. Different states, however, have different definitions for alternate assessments, which are allowed by law.

Question: In various federal laws the terms accommodations and modifications are used interchangeably. They have distinctly different meanings, though, don't they?

Answer: Yes. Since these terms are not clearly defined in existing laws, let's do so here in order to be very clear about key distinctions. Accommodations are defined as changes in a course, standard, or test's presentation, location, timing/scheduling, expectations, student response, and/or other attributes ***necessary*** to enable a student with a disability to participate (have access) and which ***do not*** fundamentally alter or lower the standards or expectations of the course, standard, or test. Modifications, on the other hand, are defined similarly, but the changes ***do*** fundamentally alter or lower the standard or expectations of the course, standard, or test [Michigan uses the term nonstandard accommodations]. Interestingly, it appears that NCLB may be using the term "adaptation" to mean "modification," while I have always used the term "adaptation" as an umbrella covering both accommodations and modifications. It would be so much easier if everybody used the same words to mean the same things!

continued on page 6

continued from page 5

Question: Is the operative word in the definition of accommodation "necessary?"

Answer: It is one of them. Note that four words are emphasized in bold in the definitions above. I would say they all are required and should be considered. In terms of necessity, accommodations are what is necessary for ***access*** or what students need. That may be different from what students and/or their parents may want.

Question: Are all accommodations equal?

Answer: No, if you mean by that that all accommodations are allowable. To include students with disabilities, states and districts are required to make accommodations when appropriate. They are only "appropriate" or "reasonable" when they do not fundamentally alter the validity of test results. For example, if you are testing math computation, allowing the use of calculators would constitute a fundamental alteration of the content being assessed. In that instance and on that assessment, calculators would not be considered a reasonable accommodation. Similarly, if you are testing a student's ability to decode text, having a reader is not reasonable. Again, it alters what is being tested.

If, however, you are testing reading comprehension or whether students can gain meaning from text, then having a reader for the assessment may be reasonable. In this instance you are testing what the student comprehends as opposed to how he or she accesses print. In my view, however, you would be better off calling this a "listening" comprehension test since that is the skill truly being tested for students who have readers.

Evaluating the reasonableness of accommodations is a process. Once you know "what" the test is designed to measure, you can determine which accommodations are reasonable. Then you can consider — on a student-by-student basis — which accommodations are appropriate for each individual. This is where the "who" comes in.

Remember, the goal of an accommodation is to level the playing field, not to change the game or substantially or fundamentally alter the field. Furthermore, while it may appear harsh, the goal of an accommodation is not to guarantee results or outcomes. Stated another way, it is not the student's ability, knowledge, or skill that determines the accommodation but, rather, the student's need for an accommodation so he or she can demonstrate his or her understanding, knowledge, or skill in the domains being tested. Keep in mind an accommodation must be necessary, not merely helpful.

Question: How can you mesh evaluating accommodations on a test-by-test basis with evaluating them on an individual-by-individual basis? It seems somewhat contradictory.

Answer: In most cases you have to consider both. Start with the test, then the student. If the test does not allow an accommodation, it may end the matter right there. For example, in one case, the OCR found that the use of a calculator on the mathematics portion of Nevada's test would fundamentally alter the test. In this case, starting with the "what" was as far as the OCR needed to go.

In another case, the OCR was asked to consider whether the Hawaii State Department of Education discriminated against a student because it did not provide him with a reader during an examination requirement for a regular high school diploma. (On this assessment, the Department did allow readers, but only for visually impaired students.) The OCR found a procedural violation of Section 504 because the Department failed to consider the student's need for reading assistance on an individual basis. Decisions by disability category do not pass muster.

Should a reader be provided for a certain student? That depends on the purpose of the test, the types of accommodations that are reasonable, and the disability of the child. That is how you mesh evaluating accommodations on a test-by-test basis and a student-by-student basis.

Question: Can you give some examples from case law where accommodations have been found to be unreasonable or inappropriate?

Answer: There are several good examples. Recently the court in Indiana upheld Indiana's diploma exam. The state did not allow students to use accommodations or modifications on the exam even though they were in their IEPs. The court found that those modifications would have, in fact, invalidated the test and there is no legal requirement to fundamentally alter or lower standards as an accommodation.

There was a somewhat similar finding with Alabama's high school exit exam (a minimum competency test required to obtain a regular high school diploma). The student plaintiff requested that the language and math portions of the test be read to him. Evidence showed that this student had never had a reading accommodation for any test, and that he had passed all of his subjects nonetheless. Thus, the accommodations were not necessary for the student.

In addition to being necessary, accommodations must also be tailored to meet

continued on page 7

continued from page 6

a student's disability. In a school district in Texas, a student was removed from pre-Advanced Placement biology because of a failing grade though she was doing well in other classes. Her parents sought several accomodations, including extra time. However, there was no evidence that extra time was relevant to her diagnosed disability—focal dystonia (or "writers" cramp). No violation was found.

Question: Why is it so important to make sure that accommodations are used appropriately?

Answer: The danger of providing accommodations inappropriately is that the test becomes invalid due to nonstandardized testing conditions. Or, to use the terms I defined earlier, the accommodations are, in fact, modifications. The balancing of accommodations and test validity is an ongoing challenge for educators. We have to ask, though, without valid tests, what is left? What are we measuring then? What can those scores mean? It is one thing to use scores gained with modifications and/or accommodations for diagnosing difficulties or for other pedagogical reasons; it is quite another to use them for accountability, norming comparisions, or achievement purposes. The former are fine; the latter are not.

Question: Where should accommodation decisions be made?

Answer: Accommodations are best considered at IEP Team or 504 meetings, and all decisions must be recorded in the student's IEP or 504 plan. This is what I call "giving notice," and it is vital. Once an accommodation is listed in a student's plan, it protects districts and informs parents. If an accommodation is not listed, districts are not required to provide it at testing time. Remember, parents are entitled to all relevant information they need in order to make informed decisions for their children.

Question: In your presentation you talk about the concept of a "fair" test? What do you mean by that?

Answer: Simply stated, a "fair" test tests what is taught (that is, it correlates test items with the curriculum offered to students). "Fair testing" is a constitutional requirement for high stakes tests, such as diploma tests. In discussing other testing, fairness is not a constitutional requirement, but it is a useful attribute closely linked to issues of aligning the curriculum with the test.

That gets back to why I believe it is so important to start all conversations about assessment, accountability, and accommodations with the "what." What do we want students to learn? What are we teaching them? If a test is designed to measure whether a student has mastered certain subject matter, then the content of the test must correlate with what the student had the opportunity to learn. It is the "what" that allows us to set high standards for everyone. It also dictates what accommodations are reasonable.

While educators may wince, "teaching to the test" is perhaps the best thing they can to do to meet the notion of a "fair" test, or what is sometimes referred to as OTL or the opportunity to learn. (Again, this notion is most appropriately applied in the high stakes arena where a "fair test" is required. I do not mean to imply that it is required in all testing. Nevertheless, it is usually considered "good practice.") Interestingly, if tests are meaningful and assess higher order thinking and production, skills, and knowledge, then we have a happy joining of legal and pedagogical requirements.

Question: So when you speak to audiences around the country, what message do you try to leave them with?

Answer: The legal issues surrounding assessment, accountability, accommodations, high standards, inclusion, everything…all go back to "thou shalt not discriminate." Students have, and should have, rights. One of those rights is to be included. The hard part is determining how to include everyone without lowering standards.

That is why it is imperative to start our conversations about standards and accountability with the "what"—what is it we want all kids to learn? Once you determine the what—and that may include both academics (like reading and math) and non-academics (like steady attendance)—you can decide what accommodations or modifications can appropriately be used to enable students to demonstrate their knowledge and skill, or what modifications you might use for other purposes, such as diagnosis, descriptive teaching, demonstration progress, and so forth. You also can determine whether alternate assessments are more appropriate.

The "who" really comes last. If we start making decisions based on the "who" first—and changing our standards based upon which group of kids we are talking about at a particular moment—then we risk lowering standards for everyone. Unfortunately, lowering standards does not lead to improved results or expectations. I also do not believe that is what parents want. I have never heard a parent say: "Yes, let's lower standards so my child can appear to do better." What they want is for us to set high standards, be very clear about what those standards are, find ways to help their children meet those standards, and then provide them with meaningful and relevant opportunities to demonstrate what they have learned.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress and NCLB

When IEP Teams meet, team members must discuss how their student will be assessed locally and at the state level. They may also have to discuss their student's participation in a national assessment program called the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Since many people are not familiar with NAEP, we have included the following introductory article in this issue of The Assist. *It may be shared with IEP Teams to familiarize them with the national assessment program in which Michigan schools must participate if selected by the federal government.*

IEP Team members also need to know that NAEP has its own accommodation guidelines that need to be considered. To obtain information about available assessment accommodations, teams can go to ***http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard****, click on an assessment subject area (such as reading or mathematics), and then click on "learn who took the assessment and how the assessment is administered." Teams can then see what accommodations are allowed and consider which ones are necessary for their students.*

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is often referred to as the "Nation's Report Card," is an ongoing national assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas, including, but not limited to, reading, writing, mathematics, science, world geography, U.S. history, civics, and art. Since 1969, NAEP assessments have been administered voluntarily to students across the nation in an effort to generate data showing what students are learning at critical junctures in their school experience. Those data are then used by policymakers at the national and state level to formulate education policy.

NAEP has two primary goals: to measure student achievement in the context of instructional experiences and to track change in the achievement of fourth-, eighth-, and twelfth-graders over time in selected content areas. For example, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), which is responsible for carrying out the NAEP Project, recently reported that the percentage of fourth- and eighth-graders who performed at or above the Proficient level in reading was higher in 2002 than in 1992, while the 12th-grade percentage at this level was lower.

Unlike many standardized assessments with which educators and parents are familiar, NAEP assessment results are not reported by individual students or schools, but instead by populations of students (e.g., fourth- or eighth-graders) and subgroups of those populations (e.g., female students, Hispanic students). The results are based on representative samples of students pulled from across the country or from across a specific state.

While full participation in NAEP assessments has always been voluntary for every pupil, school district, and state, federal law requires that all states that receive Title I funds, and all school districts that receive Title I funds and are selected for the NAEP sample, must, at a minimum, participate in NAEP reading and mathematics assessments at fourth and eighth grades.

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the incentives for participating in the NAEP Project became even stronger. As the NCES explains, beginning with the 2002/2003 school year, those states that wish to receive Title I grants from the federal government must participate biennially in the fourth- and eighth-grade NAEP reading and mathematics assessments, with the federal government assuming the full cost of test administration. Under NCLB, NAEP results also must not evaluate or access personal or family beliefs and attitudes or publicly disclose personally identifiable information.

Interestingly, prior to 1996, NAEP did not have a policy to allow assessment accommodations for students with disabilities or English language learners, which resulted in the exclusion of some special needs students. With the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, however, NAEP began studying the effect of assessment accommodations on assessment results. The results of that study led to a two-pronged approach to data collection: (1) accommodations were allowed in all subject areas where new trend lines were being introduced (such as writing and civics) and (2) sample data for existing trend lines were split into two categories—one where testing accommodations were allowed and one where they were not. That two-pronged approach enabled the program to maintain data trends to the past and begin new trend baselines in which accommodations were permitted. That approach was used until 2002 when the NCES began reporting NAEP results only from samples in which assessment accommodations were allowed.

For more information about the NAEP Project, go to **http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/**. Once there, you may obtain Michigan-specific data as well as national data. For example, currently posted data for the state show that, in 2000, average scale scores for fourth- and eighth-grade students in Michigan exceeded average scale scores for fourth- and eighth-grade students across the country in mathematics, reading, and science. (Scale scores provide information about the distribution of student achievement for groups and subgroups.) That has been the case as far back as 1992. At this site you may also obtain demographic information for Michigan, view achievement levels (as well as scale scores), and compare Michigan's assessment scores with those of other states. To learn more about NAEP, NCLB, and Michigan's involvement with the project, contact Kimberly Young, NAEP Coordinator at 517-241-2360.

Phase 2 MI-Access Update

This summer the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) posted the *Proposed Assessment Plan for Developing Phase 2.1 MI-Access Assessments* on its Web site **www.mi.gov/mi-access** for field review. The purpose of the plan is to

- provide important and pertinent background information on MI-Access, why it was developed, and how Phase 1 MI-Access was implemented;
- describe what Phase 2.1 MI-Access assessments may look like, including who will be assessed, what will be assessed, the format of the assessment, blueprints, and sample assessment items;
- give districts, schools, special educators, and others involved in education an opportunity to see what is being proposed so they can provide feedback to the MDE and begin aligning curriculum and instruction as needed; and
- allow information about the upcoming assessments to be shared with students, parents, teachers, curriculum specialists, administrators, and the public.

There are several key things to keep in mind when reviewing the proposed assessment plan. First, it was developed by a specially-convened plan-writing team comprised of twenty-four educators and parents, all of whom have experience living and/or working with learners with special needs. In order to ensure balance, the team members represented a broad spectrum of backgrounds, experience, geographic regions, and demographics.

Second, the proposed plan focuses only on what is now referred to as Phase 2.1 students, instead of the "grand canyon" of all students eligible for Phase 2 MI-Access. The team defined the Phase 2.1 group of students as those whose skills are beyond those needed for MI-Access Supported Independence, but not such that they could participate fully in the MEAP, even with assessment accommodations. These students have, or function as if they have, mild cognitive impairment. They also have a limited ability to generalize learning across contexts and their learning rates are significantly slower than those of their age-level peers. It was determined that these students could benefit from a more functionally-based assessment containing a mix of English language arts, mathematics, and career and employability skills items.

Third, the proposed plan represents the plan-writing team's "ideal" assessments. In practice, they may need to be shortened to reduce test-taking time; reformatted to reduce one-on-one administration requirements; and otherwise modified to work within the constraints of the school day. In their current form, however, they represent the team's best thinking about what it would like Phase 2.1 MI-Access students to know and be able to do, as well as the very best ways to assess that knowledge.

Before the Department finalizes the Phase 2.1 MI-Access assessments, it wants and needs to hear from the field. What do you think of the student population descriptions? What do you think about the underlying assumptions and universal design principles used to craft the assessments? Is what you are teaching your Phase 2.1 students reflected in the content to be assessed? What do you think about the assessment design? What do you think about the suggested amount of time each assessment will take to administer?

To give the MDE feedback, log onto the online survey at **http://esrealitycheck.com/survey/index.asp?i=1295513**. The comment period ends October 17, 2003, so please do not put this task off. Your input will be thoughtfully and carefully considered. (For a hard copy of the proposed plan, download it from **www.mi.gov/mi-access**.)

GLOSSARY

Assessment Plan: Much like a builder's blueprint, an assessment plan guides how an assessment is built or developed. It includes detailed information on (1) the assumptions underlying the assessment; (2) the populations and subject areas assessed; (3) the number of assessment items and their formats; (4) prototype items to guide item writers; and (5) other information clarifying how and why the assessment should be developed.

Standardization: In test administration, maintaining a constant testing environment and conducting the test according to detailed rules and specifications, so that testing conditions are the same for all test takers.

Criterion-referenced Test: A test that allows its users to make score interpretations in relation to a functional performance level, as distinguished from those interpretations that are made in relation to the performance of others. Examples of criterion-referenced interpretations include comparisons to cut scores, interpretations based on expectancy tables, and domain-referenced score interpretations. [Note: MI-Access assessments are all criterion-referenced.]

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): An ongoing national assessment of what the country's students know and can do in various subject areas at critical junctures in their school experience. Results are not reported by individual students or schools, but instead by populations of students and sub-groups of those populations.

Tools to Help IEP Teams Determine State Assessment

Deciding which state assessment a student should take is not an easy task. IEP Teams may find both the Checklist shown below and the Flow Chart on the next page useful in the decision-making process.

IEP Team State Assessment Decision-Making Checklist

Using the *Guidelines for Determining Participation in State Assessment for Students with Disabilities...*

❑ Determine whether the student is in a grade level assessed by the state. If so, proceed with the checklist.

❑ Review the four "levels of independence" or how your student will likely function cognitively in adult life roles. Is your student Full, Functional, Supported, or Participation? (The "At a Glance" Table in the state's guidelines may be helpful.) Remember, this decision is based on the student's cognitive functioning level, not on his or her special education category or physical disability(ies).

❑ Review the assessment options in the Michigan Educational Assessment System (MEAS), including the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP), the MEAP with assessment accommodations (standard and nonstandard), Phase 1 MI-Access, and Phase 2 MI-Access.

❑ Use the student's level of independence to determine which state assessment program—the MEAP or MI-Access—is most appropriate for him or her.

❑ If the team chooses the MEAP, determine if the student will take one or more of the MEAP assessments required at that grade level. You must go through this, content area by content area.

❑ For **each** content area, determine whether the student will need assessment accommodations and specify which ones the IEP Team recommends. Keep in mind that some accommodations are considered "standard" while others are considered "nonstandard." If the team chooses nonstandard accommodations, the student's score will not be eligible for Merit Awards and it will be counted in Adequate Yearly Progress calculations as a zero or "not proficient."

❑ As required by IDEA, if the IEP Team determines that it is inappropriate for the student to participate in a MEAP content-area assessment (English Language Arts, as an example), the BRIGANCE® must be administered until Phase 2 MI-Access assessments are developed and implemented.

❑ Indicate in the student's IEP why the MEAP content-area assessment(s) is inappropriate for him or her.

❑ If the team chooses MI-Access as the student's state assessment program, determine whether MI-Access Participation, MI-Access Supported Independence, or Phase 2 MI-Access is most appropriate.

❑ If the team chooses MI-Access Participation, use the checklist in the state's guidelines to provide the student's teacher with guidance on how the student behaves in specific situations. The behavior should reflect the student's curriculum and instruction.

❑ If the team chooses MI-Access Supported Independence, review the "Levels of Allowable Assistance" Table in the state's guidelines to see what assistance will be allowed the student during the assessment. Levels of Allowable Assistance vary by student age.

❑ If the team determines that the student should participate in Phase 2 MI-Access, the BRIGANCE® will be administered to the student until the Phase 2 assessments are developed.

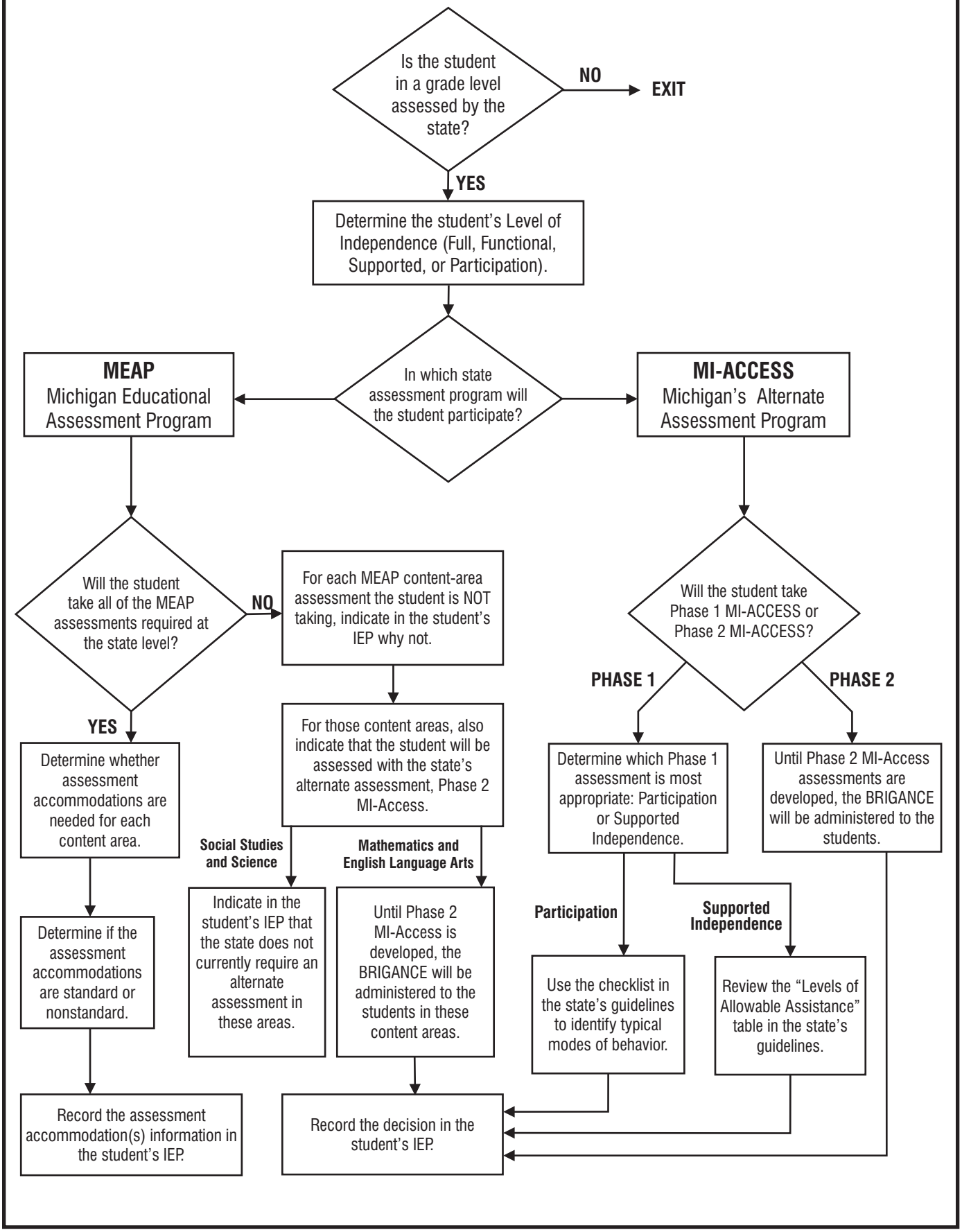
Reminder: MI-Access Switches from Age to Grade in 2003/2004

This year, all students who are in grades 4, 7, 8, and 11 MUST be assessed at the state level — including students whose IEP Teams have determined they should be administered MI-Access assessments. The following table shows which grade-level assessment a student should be administered if he or she is ungraded.

MEAP/MI-Access Grades Assessed *(If a student is in one of these grades, he or she MUST be assessed at the state level.)*	**Phase 1 MI-Access Ages** *(If a student is NOT assigned a grade level, but is one of these ages as of December 1 of the assessment year, he or she MUST be assessed using the MI-Access grade assessment in the left-hand column.)*
Grade 4	10 years old
Grade 7	13 years old
Grade 8	14 years old
Grade 11	17 and 18 years old

Note: No Child Left Behind requires that students in these grade levels be assessed in the state assessment system. In 2005/2006, grades 3, 5, and 6 will be added.

IEP Team State Assessment Decision-Making Flow Chart



The Assist

Important MI-Access Dates

Submit Coordinator Designations and Training Material Requests Online
August 1 – August 21

MI-Access Training Materials Arrive in Districts
by September 15

MI-Access Annual Conferences
September 10 – Marquette
September 23 – Grayling
September 29 – Lansing

Submit Estimates of MI-Access Teacher/ Student Counts to BETA/TASA
October 1 – October 13

MI-Access Live Teleconference
January 21, 2004 (tentative)

Bookmark these Web sites:

www.mi.gov/mde
www.mi.gov/mi-access
www.mi.gov/mde/swd/accommodations
www.meritaward.state.mi.us/mma/meap.htm
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard

This newsletter related to the assessment of students with disabilities is distributed to local and intermediate superintendents, directors of special education, MI-Access Coordinators, MEAP Coordinators, SEAC, Special Education monitors, MDE staff, school principals, Parent Advisory Committees, and institutes of higher education. *The Assist* may also be downloaded from **www.mi.gov/mi-access**.

If you receive multiple copies of this newsletter, please share them with:

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____ Parents
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____ Community Organizations

Michigan Department of Education
MI-Access, Michigan's Alternate Assessment Program
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